



Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse

Text and Context

David Tombs

Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse: Text and Context

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Preface

I first presented this work as a conference paper entitled ‘Biblical Interpretation in Latin America: Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse’, in the Biblical Hermeneutics Section at the Society of Biblical Literature International Meeting, Krakow, 18-22 July 1998. The following year it was revised and published as ‘Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse’ in the *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*.¹

At that time, I was lecturing in theology at the University of Roehampton and studying part-time for a PhD at Heythrop College, University of London.² My topic was Latin American liberation theology with a focus on Christology. The paper had initially been proposed under the title ‘Biblical Interpretation in Latin America: 1968-1998’. It was originally envisioned as a review of how liberationist hermeneutics had evolved and changed over these years, and as a response to some of the criticisms raised against the liberationist approach.³ However, my work on torture and counter-insurgency practices in Latin America during the months immediately leading up to the conference prompted a change of focus. I decided to offer my own case study of how a current political context can offer insights into biblical texts. I had become aware of a disturbing story of a public and highly sexualized execution of a female health worker during the counter-insurgency violence in El Salvador during the early 1980s.⁴ I was struck not only by the extremity of the violence, but also the silence around it in the writing of the liberation theologians who I greatly admired.⁵

The paper was my attempt to respond to both the violence and the silence. I hoped to explore how taking this unspeakable violence seriously might offer further insights into the crucifixion narratives and the liberationist approach.⁶ However, the article does not include the disturbing story that prompted the research. At the time it seemed too graphic; so I drew my examples of state terror and sexual violence from other sources.

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- 1 David Tombs, ‘Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse’ in the *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 53 (Autumn 1999), 89-109. Available at Otago University Research Archive <http://hdl.handle.net/10523/6067>.
 - 2 I worked at the University of Roehampton in London from 1992-2001. During which time it had a number of name changes from its earlier time as Roehampton Institute London. Many of my colleagues at Roehampton made helpful comments on the paper between the conference and its publication the following year.
 - 3 This would have built upon David Tombs, ‘The Hermeneutics of Liberation’ in Stanley E. Porter and David Tombs (eds.), *Approaches to New Testament Study* (JSNT Supplement Series 120; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 310-55. The original intention to plot the chronological development of the hermeneutical approach was absorbed into my subsequent book *Latin American Liberation Theology* (Religion in the Americas Series Vol. 1; Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2002).
 - 4 Renny Golden and Michael McConnell, *Sanctuary: The New Underground Railway* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 64-65. I first read about it during 1997, quoted by Christian Smith in his book *Resisting Reagan: The U.S. Central America Peace Movement* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), 53. I had first visited El Salvador in 1988, following a graduate year studying liberation theologies at Union Theological Seminary, New York. I made a second visit in 1996. Reading the story so soon after this second visit made a strong impression. Sadly the name of the health worker who was killed is not preserved in these accounts.
 - 5 The influence of liberation theology in shaping the insights behind the article is discussed in my inaugural lecture, ‘The Ongoing Legacy of Liberation Theology’, Inaugural Professorial Lecture, University of Otago (8 September 2015), http://www.otago.ac.nz/cs/groups/public/@otagopodcast/documents/audio_video/otago552201.mp4
 - 6 On sexual violence as an unspeakable violence and the silence around it in El Salvador and Guatemala, see David Tombs, ‘Unspeakable Violence: The Truth Commissions in El Salvador and Guatemala’ in Iain Maclean (ed.), *Reconciliation: Nations and Churches in Latin America* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 55-84.

The Salvadoran execution remains a deeply disturbing display of terror but in the years since I first read it my understanding of sexual violence has grown. Later in my research I found a very similar account of an execution in neighbouring Guatemala. It therefore now seems more appropriate to record it here rather than to pass over it in silence a second time.

The execution was witnessed by the teenager Brenda Sánchez-Galan, one of the first Salvadoran refugees on the 'underground railway' to be arrested in the United States in 1984. Brenda had worked as an assistant in a medical centre for refugees near San Salvador supported by the Lutheran Church. The military arrested the medical centre's doctor and tortured him for six months. Eventually he was released following pressure from the Swiss Embassy. The security forces then targeted his assistants. One night, soldiers abducted one of Sánchez-Galan's co-workers. They tortured and raped her at the national guard headquarters. The next morning, the soldiers brought her out into the town square. A soldier placed his machine gun into her rectum, and shot her. After the execution, Sánchez-Galan and her daughter sought refuge with the Lutheran Church, who helped them move to safety in Mexico City, and then to Texas, where she was able to tell her story.⁷

Much has happened in the world during the years since the paper was first presented. News on sexual violence is much more common now than it was then. Three significant global news stories from the last twenty years seem particularly relevant to the contribution the article sought to make. First, the Abu Ghraib scandal in 2004, and other torture reports from around the world, make clear that the sexualized torture practices the article draws upon are in no way limited to Latin America. They are a global phenomenon; a similar study could be done using torture and prisoner mistreatment reports from anywhere in the world. Second, churches have been called to account for clergy sexual abuse scandals in Boston in 2002, elsewhere in the United States, and in Ireland, Britain, Australia, Mexico, Chile and Peru. These have offered an additional context of institutional sexual abuse from which to reflect on Jesus as a victim of sexual abuse. Whilst undeniably different from prisoner abuse, in many ways these abuses also share important similarities, especially around the misuse of power and role of silence. These abuses have also demonstrated how many senior leaders in the churches have been so ready to ignore and cover up sexual abuses rather than, acknowledge that serious criminal offences may have been committed and assist legal authorities to find a remedy for victims or bring offenders to justice. It is not just the abuse itself but the subsequent response which requires attention. It is particularly odd that in all that has been said and written about sexual abuses within the church, the naming of Jesus as a victim of sexual abuse has barely been mentioned. Third, the #MeToo movement starting in 2017 has drawn attention to the prevalence of sexual harassment, assault and abuse of women and girls throughout society. The different ways by which this has typically been seen as normal, and therefore gone unnoticed and unaddressed, are now coming to the fore.

7 See, Golden and McConnell, *Sanctuary*, 65.

In the last decade other scholars working independently have also named Jesus as a victim of sexual abuse. Examples known to me include theologians such as Elaine Heath and Wil Gafney in the USA, and biblical scholars such as Michael Trainor in Australia.⁸ Yet the discussion has still not been taken up by scholars or by the churches with as much concern as might be expected.⁹ I have had the opportunity of presenting these ideas many times since 1998 and I find there is often a pattern in the response. People initially find it strange, or even offensive, to speak of Jesus as a victim of sexual abuse. But on learning more, they often respond that this recognition is obvious and long overdue. Many add that what they find truly strange is no longer the idea itself, but the fact they had never heard it before, or thought of it for themselves.

Sometimes the idea prompts discussion on whether it is better to say that Jesus was a victim of abuse, but not to specify this more explicitly as sexual abuse. I welcome this conversation, as it often opens up a deeper reflection on the nature of sexual abuse. In the article, I suggest a distinction can be drawn in sexual abuse between sexual humiliation and sexual assault. Sexual humiliation is, I suggest, explicitly attested in the Gospels in the repeated stripping and enforced naked exposure of Jesus. By contrast, what I termed sexual assault (to cover molestation, penetration, injury, mutilation, or even rape) is not explicitly attested, but there is a silence in the text which invites further questions in the light of torture and prisoner mistreatment elsewhere. The distinction that these two terms sought to make is an important one, but it is also important to recognise that sexual humiliation and sexual assault often take place alongside each other, and sexual humiliation is often an integral element in sexual assault. Twenty years later I now see more clearly how closely the two are entwined and I would develop this distinction with more attention to this complexity and recognition that the stripping could be viewed as assault not just humiliation. Nonetheless, the primary point behind the distinction remains correct in my opinion, the textual attestation of sexual humiliation in the stripping is sufficient in its own right to name Jesus as a victim of sexual abuse.

My own situation has also changed from when I first wrote. From London I moved to Belfast, Northern Ireland in 2001 for an academic position with the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin. In Belfast my work addressed the challenges of peace and reconciliation in the aftermath of violence. It explored the ways that religious beliefs and values could be part of the problem, or part of the answer, in some of the most pressing questions that individuals and societies struggled to address. I learnt much from those who had accumulated a painful wisdom from the conflict in Northern Ireland, especially from my colleagues at the Irish School of Ecumenics, and from friends and fellow members of the Corrymeela Community of Reconciliation.

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- 8 Elaine A. Heath, *We Were the Least of These: Reading the Bible with Survivors of Sexual Abuse* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2011); Wil Gafney, 'Crucifixion and Sexual Violence', *HuffPost* (28 March 2013); Michael Trainor, *The Body of Jesus and Sexual Abuse: How the Gospel Passion Narrative Informs a Pastoral Approach* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2014).
- 9 Recent exceptions to this include: Katie Edwards, with whom I wrote Katie B. Edwards and David Tombs, '#HimToo – Why Jesus Should be Recognised as a Victim of Sexual Abuse', *The Conversation* (23 March 2018), <https://theconversation.com/himtoo-why-jesus-should-be-recognised-as-a-victim-of-sexual-violence-93677>; Linda Woodhead who responded to this in 'Is Jesus the Latest – or was he the First – Victim of #MeToo', *The Daily Telegraph* (27 March 2018); and Jayme Reaves who is a colleague on the new project. I am also grateful to other scholars who have mentioned it in their own works, and to everyone who has offered me comments or suggestions about the work at different times.

In January 2015 I moved again, further afield, to the University of Otago, New Zealand. I now work as Director of the Centre for Theology and Public Issues and this has opened up new opportunities for further work on Jesus as a victim of sexual violence. This includes the Centre's current project 'When Did We See You Naked?'. I am grateful to editors at USQR for their permission to re-publish the article, in this new format as *Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse: Text and Context*, and to make it available for the first time in Spanish translation.¹⁰ It has been a great privilege to work on the Spanish version with Rocío Figueroa Alvear of Good Shepherd College, Auckland. My thanks to Jose Enrique Escardó Steck (translator), and Juliana Martínez (consultant) for making this possible. I am also deeply grateful to Fernando Segovia for his ongoing interest in the paper and for contributing the insightful Reflection to this second publication.

Acknowledging Jesus as a victim of sexual abuse is as important today as it has ever been. It is not just a matter of clarifying the history but can also serve a positive purpose in confronting abuses in the present and in the future. I hope that this publication will contribute to a renewed public conversation on how faith-communities and churches can understand sexual violence in its different forms more deeply, and respond to them more effectively.

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10 David Tombs, *Crucifixión, terrorismo de Estado, y abuso sexual: Texto y contexto* (Dunedin: University of Otago, Centre for Theology and Public Issues, 2018).

Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse¹

Introduction

The Bible is always read with a context in mind. Assumptions are made about the original social context of the text and these are most often derived—consciously or otherwise—from the current social context of the reader or critic. In recent decades the positive value of recognising these connections has been advocated by contextual theologies in Latin America and elsewhere. Although some critics have rightly cautioned against temptations to superficially equate contemporary social contexts and the biblical world, those committed to a contextual approach have maintained that, when used appropriately, a serious engagement with current social contexts can offer insights into the biblical context and hence into neglected aspects of the biblical text.²

One area where I believe that shared similarities between past and present contexts can be most usefully investigated is the political arena of state terror and the use of torture for this end. To illustrate this, I suggest that an understanding of how recent Latin American regimes used terror to create fear and promote fatalism provides a context to recognise Jesus' crucifixion in similar terms to state terror. Furthermore, the use of sexual humiliation and violence in Latin American torture raises questions as to whether Jesus also suffered sexual abuse. In the light of Latin American torture practices, I will argue that the Gospel accounts indicate a striking level of public sexual humiliation in the treatment of Jesus, and that even this may not disclose the full horror of Jesus' torture before his death. Although this may be a very disturbing suggestion at first, at a theological level, a God who has identified with the victims of sexual abuse can be recognised as a positive challenge for contemporary Christian understanding and response. At a pastoral level, it could help sensitize people to the experiences of those who have suffered sexual abuse and, in some cases, might even become a healing step for the victims themselves.

1 A version of this paper was first presented at the SBL International Conference, 20 July 1998, Krakow, Poland. I am grateful to all those at the conference—and others since then—who have commented on it at different stages.

2 For one of the most sophisticated and sustained developments of a contextual hermeneutic, see C. Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations* (trans. R.R. Barr; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987 [1978]). Boff's approach recognises both the similarities and differences between the contemporary Latin American context and the biblical world.

Terror, Fear and Fatalism

Twentieth-Century Latin America

Military coups in the 1960s and 1970s installed military regimes in Brazil (1964–85) and throughout the Southern Cone of Latin America (Chile, 1973–89; Uruguay, 1973–85; and Argentina, 1976–83). During these years state-sanctioned human rights abuses including torture, assassinations and disappearances were commonplace. Likewise, in the 1980s the authoritarian governments in Guatemala and El Salvador were involved in some of the most brutal campaigns of repression the region has known. The transition to democracy in Brazil and the Southern Cone countries and the peace treaties in El Salvador (1992) and Guatemala (1995) have prompted official investigations into human rights abuses during the repression. Published reports from these countries offer detailed documentation that make grim reading on the years of terror endured by the civilian populations.³

Any understanding of the political and social dynamics of the countries during this time must address the widespread use of state terror to support and enforce the illegitimate power of military regimes. Terror was an effective means in enforcing brutal authoritarianism through a culture of fear.⁴ Fear ‘persuades’ people that it is better to endure injustices fatalistically rather than to resist them. The arrest and torture of ‘suspects’ by the police and military in Latin America cannot be adequately explained in terms of the threat they might have posed or the need to elicit information from them. Rather they should be understood as intended to paralyse a society’s willingness to resist. In addition to targeting the victims themselves, disappearances, torture, and executions were intended to terrorise a public audience.

3 These include: Archdiocese of São Paulo, *Torture in Brazil: A Report by the Archdiocese of São Paulo* (trans. J. Wright; ed. J. Dassin; New York: Vintage Books, 1986); National Commission on Disappeared People, *Nunca Más: A Report by Argentina’s National Commission on Disappeared People* (trans. Writers and Scholars International; Boston and London: Faber and Faber, 1986); Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation, *Report of the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation* (2 vols; trans. P. Berryman; Notre Dame, IN: Centre for Civil and Human Rights, Notre Dame Law School, 1993). The report of the United Nations Truth Commission on El Salvador is *From Madness to Hope: The Twelve Years War in El Salvador: Report of the Truth Commission, 1992–93* (New York: United Nations, 1993). In Guatemala the final report of the Archdiocese’s *Recovery of Historical Memory Project* (REMHI) was presented on 24 April 1998 and the final report of the UN Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) *Guatemala: Memoria del Silencio* was presented on 25 February 1999.

4 See the collection of essays that explore this from different disciplines in J.E. Corradi *et al.* (eds.), *Fear at the Edge: State Terror and Resistance in Latin America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1992). On the use of torture to promote terror, see G.R. Scot, *A History of Torture* (London: Senate, 1995 [1940]); E. Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); E. Peters, *Torture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, rev. ed. 1996 [1985]).

Modern torture is usually carried out in secret. To be effective as state terror, however, it must be sufficiently public to have an effect on the population as a whole. The balance between secrecy and publicity is different in different contexts. In the Southern Cone in the 1970s secrecy was usually quite important.⁵ The disappearances and torture of alleged enemies of the state was usually a clandestine activity, but they always had a sufficiently public dimension to serve the wider political purpose. People did not just disappear in secret. There was always an audience, either casual passers-by, neighbours in nearby houses, or family and friends left behind, who were witnesses to a disappearance.⁶ By contrast, in El Salvador the emphasis between secrecy and publicity was the opposite. There was less need for secrecy and the evidence of torture was often deliberately public.⁷ After torture and execution, bodies were usually left in the open or prominently displayed by the roadside to terrorise passers-by.⁸ Americas Watch reports that in El Salvador: ‘The victims’ bodies are rarely given to relatives nor are they generally buried clandestinely, but are often displayed prominently, suggesting that the purpose of the mutilations and other tortures inflicted upon them are to intimidate and terrorize the population.’ Whether the torture was generally secret or generally public—and whether the victims were individuals, families or groups—the intimidation was directed at the population as a whole.⁹

5 The public emphasis of the Carter administration (1977–80) on human rights may have added pressure for secrecy. However, US political pressure was not applied with enough force or consistency so as adequately to deter human rights abuses.

6 One of the consequences of this mixture of secrecy with publicity was that stories and reports circulated widely but people were usually afraid to speak of them publicly. As a result, people had a sense of what was happening—as was intended—without knowing exactly what to believe or how to react to it. The uncertainty created by this mix of secrecy and publicity was highly effective in creating and maintaining the culture of fear. It encouraged a public silence that implicated the wider society in passive collusion with official denials that such horrors were occurring.

7 The Salvadoran military regime openly embraced state terror without fearing that the negative publicity would threaten US support. However much the US might appear to protest its means of repression (at least when they were forced to do so by public outcry over human rights), the Salvadoran military were confident that the US could always be relied on for military and economic aid when it was needed.

8 Americas Watch and American Civil Liberties Union, *Report on Human Rights in El Salvador*, 73. However, even in El Salvador the need for secrecy did not disappear. Although the bodies were openly displayed the disappearances themselves were invariably conducted in a clandestine way and state officials always denied any knowledge as to the whereabouts of the victims or the involvement of the state in human rights abuses.

9 On the use of torture and the psychology behind it, see G.R. Scot, *A History of Torture*; E. Scarry, *The Body in Pain*.

The First-Century Roman Empire

Crucifixion was more than the punishment of an individual and should be understood in the context of state terror policies in the ancient world.¹⁰ As acts of terror against potentially rebellious people, the Romans principally used crucifixions against slaves and other subject peoples who might challenge Roman authority.¹¹ One of the clearest illustrations of the use of crucifixion to inspire terror is provided by Josephus's description of the treatment of those who attempted to flee Jerusalem during the siege by Titus in 70 C.E.:

Scourged and subjected before death to every torture, they were finally crucified in view of the wall. Titus indeed realised the horror of what was happening, for every day 500—sometimes even more—fell into his hands... But his chief reason for not stopping the slaughter was the hope that the sight of it would perhaps induce the Jews to surrender in order to avoid the same fate. The soldiers themselves through rage and bitterness nailed up their victims in various attitudes as a grim joke, till owing to the vast numbers there was no room for the crosses, and no crosses for the bodies. (War V. 446-52)¹²

To appreciate the role of terror in imperial policy it is helpful to note that although they were an occupation force, the Roman troops were not stationed throughout the province evenly and thus were unable to provide full day-to-day security for all parts. Instead, most of the relatively small force responsible for Palestine was concentrated in Caesarea, from which a contingent marched to reinforce the Roman presence in Jerusalem for the major festivals. Roman power was maintained through threat as much as military presence. The effectiveness and security of the Roman troops in Palestine was ultimately based on the legions in Syria and—if necessary—elsewhere in the Empire. The relatively small force in Palestine were able to maintain order because they were backed by an assurance of severe reprisals if serious rebellion broke out.¹³ The combination of moderate presence and massive threat was usually enough to preserve the so-called 'peace' of the *pax Romana*.¹⁴ The changing fortunes in the Jewish war reflects

10 For a brief history of crucifixion, see the classic work by M. Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Cross* (trans. J. Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress Press; London: SCM Press, 1977), enlarged and revised from German orig. '*Mors turpissima crucis*: Die Kreuzigung in der antiken Welt und die "Torheit" des Wortes vom Kreuz', in J. Friedrich, W. Pöhlmann and P. Stuhlmacher (eds.), *Rechtfertigung. Festschrift für Ernst Käsemann zum 70. Geburtstag* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1976). Hengel's German title *Mors turpissima crucis* ('most vile death of the cross') echoes the words of North African theologian Origen (ca. 185-ca. 254) in his *Commentary on Matthew* (on verse 27:22 and following).

11 Crucifixion was rarely used against Roman citizens and even these infrequent occasions were to punish lower classes rather than the aristocracy. On the use of crucifixion by the Romans, see the classic work by Hengel, *Crucifixion*. For recent treatments see R.E. Brown, *Death of the Messiah* (2 vols; Anchor Bible Reference Library; New York: Doubleday, 1994), 945-52 and the exhaustive bibliography, 885-87; S.D. Moore, *God's Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible* (New York: Routledge, 1996); and G.S. Sloyan, *The Crucifixion of Jesus: History, Myth, Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

12 The ET *The Jewish War* (trans. G.A. Williamson; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, rev. ed. 1970 [1959]) is used here and for all other passages cited below.

13 On Jewish resistance and the political situation under the Romans, see R.A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989).

14 Josephus records that when Vespasian arrived with his army in Galilee (67 C.E.) 'he made a show of force to inspire terror in the enemy and give them time for second thoughts in the hope that before battle was joined they would change their minds' (see War III. 127). After the fall of Jerusalem, the flogging and threatened crucifixion of a young man in front the walls at Machabeus was enough to ensure the capitulation of the fortress (War VII. 202-03).

this strategy. Josephus suggests that it was relatively easy for the Jews to overcome the occupying Roman force at the start of the revolt. It was the inevitability of Roman retaliation and the eventual destruction of the Temple that—at least according to Josephus—should have persuaded them against the revolt.

The mass crucifixions with which the Romans responded to major incidents conveyed the message of fearful retaliation with a terrifying clarity.¹⁵ Josephus describes how in 4 B.C.E. Varus (governor of Syria) responded to the upheaval caused by the inept rule of Herod's son Archelaus with the crucifixion of 2000 'ringleaders' of the troubles (*War II*. 69-79 [75]). The census revolt when Quirinius was governor of Syria (6-7 C.E.) and Coponius procurator of Judea (6-9 C.E.) also met with widespread reprisals (*War II*. 117-18, 167; *Ant.* 17.354-55, 18.1-10, 26-27). Josephus also records that when Cumanus (procurator of Judea 48-52 C.E.) took a number of prisoners involved in a dispute, Quadratus (governor of Syria) ordered them all crucified (*War II*. 241). Likewise, when Felix (procurator of Judea, 52-60 C.E.) set out to clear the country of banditry, the number that were crucified 'were too many to count' (*War II*. 253). Felix's treatment of other popular figures and their followers shows he had no mercy on those who might threaten the peace (*War II*. 259-63). Felix's successor, Festus (60-62 C.E.), presumably used similarly draconian punishment when he 'killed a considerable number of bandits and captured many more' (*War II*. 271). Josephus also records how in the build-up to the revolt in 66 C.E., Florus (procurator 64-66 C.E.) raided the Temple treasury and then—because of the disturbance that followed—scourged and crucified men, women and children until the day's death toll was 3600 (*War II*. 305-08).

Individual crucifixions should be understood within this political context. Even if only one victim was crucified, the execution had more significance than the punishment of an individual victim. Crucifixion was an important way in which the dire consequences of rebellion could be kept before the public eye.¹⁶ Whether the spectators applauded the crucifixion or were appalled by it, they would all have understood its message and might have felt the fear that it generated. Even if some enjoyed the sadistic scene, they would inevitably witness Rome's might and see the consequences of opposition to it. Individual crucifixions served to remind people of the mass crucifixions and other reprisals which the Romans were all too ready to use if their power was challenged.

15 Richard Horsley notes that: 'Roman warlords used crucifixion as an instrument to terrorize subject peoples into submission into imperial rule' (R.A. Horsley 'Introduction' in *idem* (ed.), *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* [Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1997], 10). In the same work see also, N. Elliot, 'The Anti-Imperial Message of the Cross', 167-83, especially 169-71.

16 Contrary to the traditional view, it is possible that the Jews themselves used crucifixion in this way. Ernst Bammel reports, 'the originally non-Jewish punishment of crucifixion had been used in Palestine since the second century BC even by Jewish courts. Because it was a particularly gruesome form of execution it was used especially in political cases' ('Crucifixion as Punishment in Palestine', in Ernst Bammel (ed.), *The Trial of Jesus* [Cambridge Studies in honour of C.F.D. Moule; London: Cambridge University Press, 1970], 163-65 [165]). For further discussion on whether the Jews used crucifixion, see J. Fitzmyer, 'Crucifixion in Ancient Palestine, Qumran Literature and the New Testament', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (1978), 493-513, and J.M. Baumgarten, 'Hanging and Treason in Qumran and Roman Law', *Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies* 16 (1982), 7-16. I am grateful to my colleague Brook Pearson for drawing my attention to these sources.

There are few detailed descriptions of how crucifixion took place—the Gospels provide the fullest description in ancient literature—but the picture that emerges fits the profile of public state torture very well.¹⁷ The victim was tied or nailed to a wooden cross to maximise their public humiliation: a contrast of the shame of the victim with the might of imperial power. The Romans displayed the victim on a roadside or similar public place. Crucifixion was a protracted ordeal that might last a number of days, a sustained attack on the dignity of the human spirit as well as the physical body.¹⁸ The shame for Jews was further heightened by the belief that ‘anyone hung on a tree is under a curse’ (Deut 21:23), a curse that Paul refers to in relation to Jesus’ crucifixion in Gal: 3:13. Displaying the shame of the ‘defeated’ victim can be seen as the inverse of the triumphal displays in Rome, which recognised the honour and glory of the conquerors. Likewise, the victim’s painful procession out of the city to crucifixion would be the symbolic inverse of a triumphal procession into Rome.¹⁹

To sum up so far, biblical texts can be legitimately read with the social and political situation of contemporary cultures of oppression in mind. In support of this, I have offered the politics of state terror as a case study in how a process of mutual illumination between biblical text and contemporary context can occur. Although both the organisers and the targets of repression—as well as the means used to carry it out—were significantly different in first-century Palestine and twentieth-century Latin America, the power dynamics in the social relationships involved are very similar.²⁰ In both cases the military regimes adopted policies of state terror and their use of torture and executions should be understood in this context.

On this basis, the Latin American torture practices of the 1970s and 1980s can provide helpful insights into neglected aspects of crucifixion in Palestine. As will be shown in the next section, the violence of Latin American regimes against dissenters often had an element of sexual abuse. In this light, a fresh look at the biblical accounts raises disturbing questions about sexual abuse in Jesus’ torture and crucifixion.

17 Analysis of how crucifixion was used in the ancient world is complicated by the close relationship between crucifixion, impalement, and the hanging of bodies (which might be carried out either before or after death). That the New Testament writers can move easily between crucifixion and hanging on a tree is shown in Gal. 3:13; Acts 5:30; 10:39.

18 During crucifixion it is likely that all control over many body functions would have failed. The following account of electric shock torture in Argentina by Néelson Eduardo Dean suggests how humiliating the consequences of this would be: ‘During the application of electricity, one would lose all control over one’s senses, such torture provoking permanent vomiting, almost constant defecation, etc.’ (*Nunca Más*, 39). I am grateful to my colleague Simonetta Calderini for pointing out that the same loss of bowel control often happens during public floggings in Middle East countries today.

19 For similarities between Jesus’ passion procession to crucifixion and the triumphs of Roman victors see the article by T.E. Schmidt, ‘Mark 15.16-32: The Crucifixion Narrative and the Roman Triumphal Procession’, *New Testament Studies* 41 (1995): 1-18. Schmidt argues that the Markan narrative deliberately draws parallels between the two to invert Jesus’ passion and present it to his readers as really a triumph.

20 One significant difference of context is that in Palestine the imperial power—Rome—ruled directly in Judah and by direct proxy in other parts of the territory. By contrast, in Latin America, the immediate ruling power was often the national military but a neo-colonial power—the USA—exercised considerable indirect power through economic, political, and military influence.

Torture, Humiliation and Sexual Abuse

Physical force is only part of the strategy used by regimes that wish to terrorise people into fatalistic submission. Crucifixion in the Roman empire was not just about physical pain but also about public shame. Likewise, Latin American torture involved deliberate attempts to shame the victims and undermine their sense of dignity. Physical torture and assaults were often coupled with psychological humiliation in attempts to end the victim's will to resist, or even to live. It is in this context that the sexual assaults and humiliation that often formed part of the torture need to be addressed.

Twentieth-Century Latin America

The recent testimonies to torture in Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Central America and elsewhere consistently report a common sexual element to torture. There is ample evidence for this, but since the reports of torture are often very disturbing, only a few representative examples need to be restated here.

In Brazil, torture by electric shock invariably included shocks to the genitals.²¹ Sometimes the so-called 'Dragon's Chair' was used and the shocks to the body were deliberately supplemented by shocks to the genitals:

The accused was obliged to sit in a chair... [they] began administering a series of electric shocks; at the same time, another torturer with an electric stick gave shocks between the legs and on the penis. (José Augusto Dias Pires, 24, journalist, Rio de Janeiro, 1977)²²

21 *Torture in Brazil*, 17, describes the two following cases as typical: 'Electric shocks are given by an army field telephone that has two long wires that are connected to the body, normally to the sexual organs, in addition to ears, teeth, tongue and fingers.' (Augusto César Salles Galvão); '... he was tortured naked, after taking a bath, while hanging on the parrot's perch where he received electric shocks from a magneto [small electric generator] to his genital organs and over his whole body.' (José Milton Ferreira de Almeida).

22 *Torture in Brazil*, 19. Furthermore, special concentration on the genital areas was also shown in physical beatings: 'They forced the accused to place his testicles resting on the chair; that Miranda and the rapporteur Holanda tried to hit the testicles with the *palmatória* [a length of thick rubber attached to a wooden paddle]' (Pedro Coutinho de Almeida, 20, student, Pernambuco, 1970) (*Torture in Brazil*, 23). The Brazilian report records that animals and insects (including alligators, snakes and cockroaches) were used against both women and men in Brazilian torture and the descriptions of this give a clearly implied sexual element to this abuse. Examples include: 'There was also, in his cubicle, to keep him company, a boa constrictor called "Miriam"...' (Leonardo Valentini) (*Torture in Brazil*, 21); 'That, when returning to the torture room, she was placed on the floor with an alligator on her naked body...' (Dulce Chaves Pandolfi, 23, Rio 1971) (*Torture in Brazil*, 21); '... that despite her being pregnant at the time and her torturers being aware of it ... the persons conducting the interrogations let dogs and snakes loose on the defendant' (Miriam de Almeida Leitão Netto, 20, journalist, Rio, 1973) (*Torture in Brazil*, 21); 'The defendant also wants to state that, during the first phase of her interrogation, cockroaches were placed over her body, and one of them into her anus' (Lúcia Maria Murat Vasconcelos, 23, student, Rio and Salvador, 1972) (*Torture in Brazil*, 21-22); '... they tied his testicles and dragged him across the room and then hung him from above by his testicles' (Manoel da Conceição Santos, 35, farm worker, Ceará, 1972) (*Torture in Brazil*, 23).

The same focus on the genitals was shown in Argentina.²³ The preferred instrument for administering electric shocks in Argentina, *la picana* (a small electrified prod), is itself highly suggestive of the sexual element in this torture.²⁴ Its use in the rape and sexual abuse of women has been well documented and at least two Argentinean male victims also witness to how this abuse eventually led to anal rape.²⁵

El Salvador provides particularly graphic and public insights into state terror because the bodies were often symbolically mutilated before they were dumped. The reports of rape and genital emasculation reflect what Daniel Santiago has called ‘the aesthetics of terror and the hermeneutics of death.’²⁶ Santiago, a North American Catholic Priest who worked for six years in the Archdiocese of San Salvador, starkly describes the morbid symbolism that was often involved:

*People were not just killed by death squads in El Salvador—they were decapitated and then their heads were placed on pikes and used to dot the landscape. Men were not just disembowelled by the Salvadoran treasury police; their severed genitalia were stuffed into their mouths. Salvadoran women were not just raped by the national guard; their wombs were cut from their bodies and used to cover their faces. It was not enough to kill children; they were dragged over barbed wire until the flesh fell from their bones while parents were forced to watch. It was not enough to kill priests. The soldiers from the United States-trained Atlacatl battalion who executed six Jesuits in November 1989 blew out the brains of these priests. This was a statement about what the killers think about the valued intellect of the Jesuit... These are not just killers. These are artisans of terror.*²⁷

23 See, for example, the following description of torture by electric shock: ‘They attached wires to his head and began to torture him with electrical current. They applied the electric prod all over his body, with preference for the genital and pectoral areas’ (Santos Aurelio Chaparro) (*Nunca Más*, 34). The following account of two men being tortured together on a bed reveals the particularly sadistic and sexual character that this treatment could take: ‘At the headquarters I was taken to the *parilla* (grill). That is, I was tied to the metal frame of a bed, electrodes were attached to my hands and feet, and they ran an electric prod all over me, with particular savagery and intensity on the genitals. [Days later] There was somebody on the “grill”; it sounded like Puértolas... They put me on the bed on top of him and when they applied the electric prod to me, he would jump too’ (Antonio Horacio Miño Retamozo) (*Nunca Más*, 29-33 [30-31]).

24 On the sexualized use of the *picana* and other sexual aspects in Argentinean torture, see F. Graziano, *Divine Violence: Spectacle, Psychosexuality, and Radical Christianity in the Argentine ‘Dirty War’* (Boulder, Colo. and Oxford: Westview Press, 1992), esp. 153-58.

25 The rape of women during torture has been well documented but recorded instances of the rape of men are less frequent. The frequency with which male prisoners were subjected to some form of rape is hard to determine. However, it is clear that rape was sometimes used to torture men as well as women. Dr Liwsky, whose extended testimony starts the *Nunca Más* report, describes his treatment in detail: ‘Another day they took me out of my cell and, despite my [previously tortured] swollen testicles, placed me face-down again. They tied me up and raped me slowly and deliberately by introducing a metal object into my anus. They then passed an electric current through the object. I cannot describe how everything inside me felt as though it were on fire’ (Dr Norbreto Liwsky) (*Nunca Más*, 20-26 [24]).

26 D. Santiago, *The Harvest of Justice: The Church of El Salvador Ten Years After Romero* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1993), 9-17.

27 Santiago, *The Harvest of Justice*, 12. The Americas Watch Report 1982, 69, cites a U.S. Public Health Commission of Inquiry on El Salvador in 1980 which reports that ‘The brutality involved in the killings of health workers and patients and the accompanying torture suggests that this is a deliberate tactic aimed at striking terror into the hearts of others. Victims have been decapitated, emasculated or found with the initial “EM”, which stands for Esquadron de la Muerte (Death Squad), in their flesh. Official forensic medical reports document these atrocities.’

No doubt the treatment of victims was conditioned by the brutal treatment that the soldiers themselves had often suffered and the dehumanized culture that had been created for 'efficient' military operations.²⁸ In a culture where the marks of masculinity were inseparable from the exercise of aggressive physical power and sexual force, the Salvadoran military were responsible for widespread sexual abuse against men, women and children.²⁹

To conclude this brief review of the sexual aspect in torture techniques in twentieth-century Latin America, two points should be stressed. First, sexual assault and humiliation were standard practices in state torture practices.³⁰ Second, the awareness of a victim's sexual humiliation among a wider public was often an important part of this humiliation, although, public knowledge of torture and humiliation might vary from second-hand accounts of what happened in torture centres to full public displays of how victims were treated.

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- 28 To understand the desire to humiliate sexually and emasculate in this way, Santiago's description of military training is particularly suggestive (*The Harvest of Justice*, 109-10). See also Santiago's comments, 15: 'They [cadets] are brutalized. Often they are raped. Deserters say that sometimes this is done by older members of the service. Sometimes the penetration is simulated with a wooden object carved to resemble a large penis. It doesn't matter because the effects are the same. Shamed and humiliated, the young recruits can only reclaim their dignity through repetition. They convince themselves that what happened to them is insignificant by doing the same to others.' The novelist Mario Vargas Llosa offers a similar picture of sexual brutality in his semi-autobiographical novel *Time of the Hero* (London: Picador, 1986 [1962]). See also the account of Peruvian military training of young conscripts in Eduardo González-Cueva, 'Heroes or Hooligans: Media Portrayals of Peruvian Youth', *NACLA* 32.1 (1998), 30-35. For a wider historical perspective on conquest and sexual violence in Latin America, see R.C. Trexler, *Sex and Conquest: Gendered Violence, Political Order, and the European Conquest of the Americas* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995). The influence of machista cultural values that can reinforce the militaristic drive to conquer and subdue should also be recognised. For an overview of machismo values and their influence, see A. Mirandé, *Hombres y Machos: Masculinity and Latino Culture* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997).
- 29 In addition to Truth Commission, *From Madness to Hope*, see also Latin America Bureau, *Violence and Fraud in El Salvador: A Report on Current Political Events in El Salvador* (London: Latin America Bureau, 1977); Americas Watch and ACLU, *Report on Human Rights in El Salvador* (New York: Vintage Press, 1982); Lawyer's Committee for Human Rights and Americas Watch, *El Salvador's Other Victims: The War on the Displaced* (New York: Lawyer's Committee for Human Rights and Americas Watch, 1984); Amnesty International Report, *El Salvador Death Squads: A Government Strategy* (London: Amnesty International, 1988); Americas Watch, *Carnage Again: Preliminary Report on Violations of the Laws of War by Both Sides in the November 1989 Offensive in El Salvador* (Washington, D.C.: Americas Watch, 1989); Americas Watch, *El Salvador's Decade of Terror: Human Rights Since the Assassination of Romero* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991).
- 30 Although the analysis of torture has been based on testimonies from Latin America, the same conclusion would be supported in other countries. The destructive combination of racial, classist and sexual instincts that influenced Salvadoran soldiers can be seen in the brutal treatment of a 33-year-old Haitian immigrant arrested in Brooklyn in the early hours of 11 August 1997. *The New York Times* describes what followed at the police station: 'At least two uniformed officers are said to have tortured and humiliated a man named Abner Louima by yanking down his trousers and driving the wooden handle of a toilet plunger so far into his rectum it punctured his small intestine and damaged his bladder. The filthy handle was then driven into Louima's mouth with enough force to break his teeth.' R. Herbert, 'One More Police Victim', *New York Times* (14 August 1997), A31. For a recent survey of police brutality in the United States, see Human Rights Watch, *Shielded from Justice: Police Brutality and Accountability in the United States* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1998). Reports of torture in prison systems of North America have also been recently publicised by Amnesty International (*Rights for All* [London: Amnesty International, 1998], esp. ch. 4) and also Human Rights Watch (*All too Familiar: Sexual Abuse of Women in U.S. State Prisons* [New York: Human Rights Watch, 1996]). It would be interesting to examine whether similar links are equally clear in security-force tactics in South Africa during the apartheid era and in the history of the British Empire in Asia, Africa and elsewhere.

The First Century Roman Empire

Against this background, the crucifixion of Jesus may be viewed with a disturbing question in mind: to what extent did the torture and crucifixion of Jesus involve some form of sexual abuse? The testimonies from twentieth-century Latin America create hermeneutical suspicions that merit careful examination of the Gospels to see whether there is any evidence that this was the case.

To explore this question further, it is helpful to distinguish between sexual abuse that involves only sexual humiliation (such as enforced nudity, sexual mockery and sexual insults) and sexual abuse that extends to sexual assault (which involves forced sexual contact and ranges from molestation to penetration, injury, or mutilation). I will argue that the Gospels clearly indicate that sexual humiliation was a prominent trait in the treatment of Jesus and that sexual humiliation was an important aspect of crucifixion. If this is the case, the possibility of sexual assaults against Jesus will also need to be considered. In the absence of clear evidence to decide this one way or another I will suggest that what has proved so common in recent torture practices cannot be entirely ruled out in the treatment of Jesus.³¹

Crucifixion in the ancient world appears to have carried a strongly sexual element and should be understood as a form of sexual abuse that involved sexual humiliation and sometimes sexual assault. Crucifixion was intended to be more than the ending of life; prior to actual death it sought to reduce the victim to something less than human in the eyes of society.³² Victims were crucified naked in what amounted to a ritualised form of public sexual humiliation.³³ In a patriarchal society, where men competed against each other to display virility in terms of sexual power over others, the public display of the naked victim by the 'victors' in front of onlookers and passers-by carried the message of sexual domination. The cross held up the victim for display as someone who had been—at least metaphorically—emasculated.³⁴ Depending on the position in which the victim was crucified, the display of

31 The concern here is sexual abuse that may have taken place in historical terms. This is separate (although it may be closely complementary) to recent work by feminist scholars who have highlighted assumptions of child abuse in various theological interpretations of crucifixion, see for example, J.C. Brown and C.R. Bohn (eds.), *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse: A Feminist Critique* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989). Theological models that present Jesus' crucifixion as part of God's plan often unthinkingly but inescapably presuppose the abuse of a child by a (divine) father. It is striking that theological models that assume the physical child abuse of Jesus as Son of God have been widely adopted whilst at the same time the sexual abuse of Jesus as an historical person has been completely ignored.

32 The other highest form of punishment—pitting humans against animals in the Roman circus—was an equally 'dehumanising' death.

33 See G. Ward, 'The Gendered Body of the Jewish Jesus' in M. Hayes, W. Porter and D. Tombs (eds.), *Religion and Sexuality* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 170-92 (esp. 178-79).

34 1 Samuel suggests that emasculation and sexual assault were also recognised practices at an earlier time in Israel's history. On emasculation, see 1 Sam 18:27: 'David rose and went along with his men, and killed one hundred of the Philistines; and David brought their foreskins, which were given in full number to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law.' On the fear of sexual-assault, see 1 Samuel 31:4: 'Then Saul said to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword and thrust me through me with it, so that these uncircumcised may not come and thrust me through, and make sport of me." I am grateful to my colleague John Jarick for pointing these out to me.'

the genitals could be specially emphasised.³⁵ Both Josephus and the Roman historian Seneca the Younger attest the Romans' enthusiasm for experimentation with different positions of crucifixion.³⁶ Furthermore, Seneca's description suggests that the sexual violence against the victim was sometimes taken to the most brutal extreme with crosses that impaled the genitals of the victim. This practice might never have been the case in Palestine—and there is no evidence that suggests it happened to Jesus—but at the very least, it suggests the highly sexualized context of violence in which Roman crucifixions sometimes took place.³⁷

The sexual element in Roman practices was part of their message of terror. Anyone who opposed the Romans would not only lose their life but also be stripped of all personal honour and human dignity. It is therefore not surprising that the Gospels themselves indicate that there was a high level of sexual humiliation in the way that Jesus was flogged, insulted and then crucified. From evidence of the ancient world it seems that flogging the victim in public whilst naked was routine. Mark, Matthew and John all imply that this was also the case with the flogging of Jesus.³⁸ Likewise, as noted above, crucifixion usually took place whilst the

35 The inscription and skeletal remains showing pierced heels discovered at Giv'at ha-Mivtar in 1968 and believed to be of a first-century victim of crucifixion have been a particular focus for discussion on how crucifixion might actually have been carried out. Hass has argued that these are consistent with the usual view that the heel bones were nailed onto the upright of the cross by a single nail (N. Hass, 'Anthropological Observations on the Skeletal Remains from Giv'at ha-Mivtar', *IEJ* 20 (1970), 38-59. However, Y. Yadin has suggested—from both the inscription and the skeletal remains—that the soles of the feet were attached bow-legged together and then the legs were looped over the top of the cross for the victim to hang upside down; see Y. Yadin, 'Epigraphy and Crucifixion', *IEJ* 3 (1973), 18-22. If Yadin is right, the exposure of the genitals would have been particularly pronounced.

36 On Josephus *War* V. 452 (see above); Seneca, *To Marcia on Consolation* 20.3, records: 'I see crosses there, not just of one kind but fashioned in many ways: some have their victims with head down toward the ground; some impale their private parts; others stretch out their arms on their crossbeam' (cited in Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 25).

37 A suggestion of the sadistic sexualisation that might be involved is offered by Josephus's description of an atrocity committed by the Hasmonean Alexander Janneus (104-78 B.C.E.) after his success against his Jewish subjects who had sought foreign military assistance from Demetrius III, the Seleucid King of Syria (95-78 B.C.E.). 'Eight hundred of the prisoners he impaled [crucified] in the middle of the City, then butchered their wives and children before their eyes; meanwhile cup in hand he reclined amidst his concubines and enjoyed the spectacle' (*War* 1.97). This event has been central to discussion on whether the Jews themselves practised crucifixion in cases of high treason (see above).

38 Although Mark 15:15; Matt. 27:26 and John 19:1 are not explicit on this (and Luke does not mention a flogging), the sequence of events they describe strongly suggests it. Mark and Mathew (who have the flogging at the end of the trial) and John (who has the flogging midway through the trial) each report that immediately after the flogging Jesus was handed over to the Roman soldiers to mock him. All three present the first act of mockery as the soldiers dressing Jesus in a crown of thorns and a purple cloak (Mark 15:17), purple robe (John 19:2) or scarlet cloak (Matt. 27:28). There is no mention of needing to strip him before doing so. By contrast, both Mk 15:20 and Matt. 27:31 explicitly mention that after the mocking he is stripped of the garb and his own clothes are put back on him for the procession to Golgotha. Brown notes that the usual custom outside Palestine was for the condemned man to be paraded naked to execution but that exceptions to this in Palestine may have been a concession to Jewish scruples on public nakedness (see Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 870). It is possible that this sensitivity was especially high within the limits of the holy city.

victim was naked and there is little reason to think that Jesus or other Jews would have been an exception to this.³⁹ If the purpose were to humiliate the victim, full nakedness would have been particularly shameful in the Jewish context.⁴⁰ Furthermore, prior to crucifixion, Jesus was handed over to a cohort of Roman soldiers to be further humiliated (Mark 15:16-20; Matt. 27:28-31; John 19:1-5).⁴¹ All the Gospels apart from Luke report that the Roman soldiers mocked Jesus by placing a crown of thorns on his head (Mark 15:17; Matt. 27:29; John 19:2) and clothing him in a purple (Mark 15:17; John 19:2) or scarlet (Matt. 27:28) garment.⁴² The texts also mention that the soldiers spat at Jesus (Mark 15:19; Matt. 27:30), struck him with a reed (Mark 15:19; Matt. 27:30), and mocked him with verbal taunts (calling him King: Mark 15:18; Matt. 27:29; John 19:3) and symbolic homage (kneeling before him, Mark 15:19; Matt. 27:29; John 19:2).⁴³

39 This is clearest in John 19:23-24 which records that after putting Jesus on the cross the soldiers took his clothes to divide amongst themselves and that these included his undergarment for which they cast lot so as not to tear it. The synoptic Gospels (Mark 15:24, Matt. 27:35 and Luke 23:34) are a little more vague and simply refer to the division of his clothes by lots. In a careful assessment of the evidence Raymond Brown offers cautious support for the likelihood of full nakedness. Although Brown reports that the evangelists are not specific on the matter, and that they might not have known for sure, he offers three reasons that would support the view that Jesus was fully naked (*The Death of the Messiah*, 952-53). First, Roman custom as presented by Artemidorus Daldianus (*Oneirokritika* 2.53); second, John's detailed description of the division of clothing including the undergarment; third, early depictions and references to Christ as naked on the cross. As possible considerations against this he mentions that Jewish sensitivity over nudity was particularly high (witnessed in Jubilees 3:30-31 and 7:20) and therefore Judea may have been an exception to Roman custom. In support of this it is possible that if clothing was permitted on the procession to the execution, as suggested above, a loincloth might have been permitted at the execution and early sources can be cited to show that this came to be the accepted view quite early on. In the absence of clear evidence Brown points out that there is now no way to settle the question but he acknowledges that the balance of circumstantial evidence 'favors complete despoliation' (*The Death of the Messiah*, 953).

40 On the deliberate humiliation of enemies by genital exposure, see 2 Sam. 10:4-5 which describes how David's envoys were seized by Ha'nun and sent back with their beards half shaved and their garments cut off 'in the middle at their hips'. Jewish sensitivity over insulting displays of the body is also shown in a disaster which occurred during the time that Cumanus was governor (48-52 C.E.). Josephus reports that a soldier on guard on the Temple colonade during the Feast of Unleavened Bread lifted his tunic, bent over indecently and exposed himself to the crowds below whilst making indecent noises (*War* II. 223-27). Fearing a riot in the commotion that followed, Cumanus sent for heavy infantry but this triggered a panic, and Josephus claims that 30,000 were crushed to death as they tried to escape.

41 For Mark and Matthew this happens at the end of the trial and both mention it taking place in the praetorium. For John the mockery takes place during the trial although it appears to have been done within Pilate's headquarters (18:28).

42 Luke places the mocking of Jesus rather earlier in the story at a point that is unlikely to have involved Roman soldiers. According to Luke 22:63-64, the mockery takes place prior to the trial before the Jewish elders. The mocking, beating, blindfolding and challenges to prophesy (Luke makes no mention of spitting) were carried out by the men who were holding Jesus overnight before the trial before the Council. Presumably these were members of 'the crowd' mentioned as capturing him in Luke 22:47. Mark 15:18-19 and Matt. 26:67-68 also report that Jesus was spat at, struck and challenged to prophesy, but they put this immediately after the Council had condemned him, rather than before, and say it was carried out by members of the Council themselves. John does not mention any parallel treatment associated with the questioning by the High Priest (John 18:19-24).

43 In addition, Matt. 27:29 also mentions placing the reed in Jesus' right hand prior to striking him and although John makes no mention of a reed, John 19:3 records Jesus being struck in the face.

Based on what the Gospel texts themselves indicate, the sexual element in the abuse is unavoidable. An adult man was stripped naked for flogging, then dressed in an insulting way to be mocked, struck and spat at by a multitude of soldiers before being stripped again (at least in Mark 15:20 and Matt. 27:31) and re-clothed for his journey through the city—already too weak to carry his own cross—only to be stripped again (a third time) and displayed to die whilst naked to a mocking crowd. When the textual presentation is stated like this, the sexual element of the abuse becomes clear: the assertion is controversial only in so far as it seems startling in view of usual presentations.⁴⁴ The sexual element to the torture is downplayed in artistic representations of the crucifixion that show Jesus wearing a loincloth. These images distance us from the biblical text, perhaps because the sexual element has been too disturbing to confront.

Although it is vital to acknowledge the sexual humiliation that is revealed in the text, what the texts might conceal may also be significant. There may have been a level of sexual abuse in the praetorium that none of the Gospels immediately discloses. This suspicion is prompted by the testimonies from Latin America presented earlier. Whilst the testimonies from Latin America do nothing to directly establish the historical facts of crucifixion in Palestine, they are highly suggestive for what may have happened within the closed walls of the praetorium.⁴⁵

Both Matthew and Mark describe Jesus as being handed over weakened and naked—already a condemned man without any recourse to justice—to soldiers who took him inside the praetorium and assembled the other troops.⁴⁶ Both Gospels explicitly state that it was the *whole cohort (speira)* of Roman soldiers—between six hundred and one thousand men—that was assembled together to witness and participate in the ‘mockery’. This probably included

44 This paper is primarily concerned with how the texts present events. The picture of abuse they present is historically very plausible but further assessment of textual historicity will not be attempted here. In view of the shame and embarrassment that would have been associated with sexual abuse, it is probable that the Gospels understate it rather than exaggerate it.

45 The privacy of the praetorium (whether Pilate’s palace or the Antonia fortress) means that the details of what transpired inside are inevitably circumstantial and would probably not have been known even at the time. Furthermore, even if it was believed that Jesus had been sexually assaulted in the praetorium, the absence of this in the Gospel accounts is hardly surprising. Apart from the distance of years and the desire to pass over a shameful event, the Gospels are usually seen as notably biased in excusing the Romans for Jesus’ trial and death.

46 Despite the attempts of the Gospels to excuse Pilate from blame, if rape did take place in the praetorium, presumably it would only have done so with Pilate’s positive approval or knowing indifference. It is quite possible that Pilate deliberately handed Jesus over to be sexually assaulted by his soldiers as part of the crucifixion sentence. Such an action might have served to reinforce his own status as a triumphant lord who was able to sexually vanquish his victims through the actions of his underlings. Trexler notes that a Roman master might find it more insulting to have his slaves rape his adulterous wife’s young suitor rather than to rape the youth himself (*Sex and Conquest*, 22). The soldier’s understanding of Pilate handing over a naked victim is illustrated in the following description of gang rape in the Guatemalan REMHI report: ‘We found a woman. I called a soldier and told him, “Take charge of this woman. She’s a gift from the sub-lieutenant”. “I understand, my corporal”, he told me and he called the boys and said, “There’s meat here, guys”’ (cited in K. Ogle, ‘Guatemala’s REMHI Project: Memory from Below’, *NACLA* 32.2 [1998], 33–34 [34]).

a significant number of Syrian auxiliaries who might have viewed their Jewish neighbours with particular hostility.⁴⁷ In view of the testimonies to gang rapes that are given by victims detained by security forces in the clandestine torture centres of Latin America, this detail of overwhelming and hostile military power sounds a particularly disturbing note.

Many in the Roman cohort would have experienced the fears and frustrations of military life in an occupied country, which could have generated an awkward inner tension of omnipotence and powerlessness. As representatives of imperial Rome, the soldiers collectively exercised almost unlimited power. On the other hand, each individual soldier was at the bottom of a long chain of Roman hierarchical command and would also have felt their individual powerlessness on a daily basis. The instinctive response to such powerlessness is often to impose one's own power forcefully on those who are even less powerful.⁴⁸ Individual soldiers had very little freedom or personal choice to act on this, however, and often their interactions with local people would reinforce their feelings of powerlessness and frustration. The common soldier would often have to suffer without taking immediate revenge when faced by lack of co-operation, disrespect or barely concealed hostility. The resentment created by this situation would normally have been held in check by military discipline and the fear of military superiors who wished to avoid unnecessary trouble wherever possible. Nonetheless the aggressive urge to vengeance would remain close to the surface and could give rise to extreme violence when superiors were willing to turn a blind eye or sanction its expression on a sacrificial victim. The desire to take out the frustrations and brutalities of military life through sexual violence has given rise to atrocities throughout history.

Josephus's account of the Siege of Jerusalem (*War*, V. 420-572) suggests that the comparisons between the ancient world and modern Latin American torture practices may be appropriate. Josephus's description of how the Jewish militants inside Jerusalem tortured the civilian population in the search for food provides a graphic insight into sexual tortures at the time: 'Terrible were the methods of torture they devised in their quest for food. They stuffed bitter vetch up the genital passages of their victims, and drove sharp stakes into their seats' (*War*, V. 435). Although the actual historicity of Josephus's claims can hardly be taken for granted (since Josephus was writing for a Roman audience and his exaggerations and vested interest in casting the Jewish rebels in a poor light affects his testimony throughout his account), it

47 Josephus suggests that, at least whilst Felix was procurator (52–60 C.E.), the majority of the Roman garrison in Caesarea were raised in Syria and they readily sided with the Syrian inhabitants of Caesarea in a civil dispute against its Jewish citizens (*War*, II. 266-270 [268]).

48 The same psychology lies behind Santiago's comments on Salvadoran military recruits noted above and has been used elsewhere to help explain male rapes in prison. Thus A.N. Groth and H.J. Birnbaum (*Men Who Rape* [New York: Plenum Press, 1979], 132, cited in M.M. Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin* [Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1983], 181) write: 'When a person feels powerless in regard to controlling his life, he can defend against the discomfort of such an experience by asserting control over someone else. In this way, he comes to feel more powerful than his victim and thus compensates for his feelings of inadequacy. This is particularly evident in prison rape, where the offender's tenuous sense of identity, personal control, and self-esteem are further diminished by his incarceration. Sexual assault becomes a means of compensating for his sense of helplessness and vulnerability and of retaliating for his feelings of resentment and anger.'

nonetheless suggests that the sexualized tortures of twentieth-century Latin America might correspond quite closely to their first-century Mediterranean equivalents. Likewise, Plato's description in the *Gorgias* of a hypothetical crucifixion (preceded by torture and castration whilst on the rack) indicates that castration might have taken place prior to crucifixion in at least some parts of the ancient world.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the historian Richard Trexler has claimed that the anal rape of male captives was 'a practice notoriously rife in the ancient world'.⁵⁰ In view of this background it is important to ask whether the fraternal and respectful kiss of greeting in the Garden of Gethsemane might have set events in motion that led to some form of sexual assault in the praetorium of Pilate.⁵¹

The privacy of the praetorium makes it unrealistic to expect a definitive answer on what exactly happened inside. Nonetheless, the suspicions raised by the experiences of those who have suffered under recent Latin American regimes suggest that a question mark needs to be put against the completeness of the Gospel narratives at this point. There is a possibility that the full details of Jesus' suffering are missing from the Gospel accounts. Whereas the texts offer clear indications of sexual humiliation, the possibility of sexual assault can only be based on silence and circumstance. However, it should be remembered that although a distinction in sexual abuse between humiliation and assault is helpful, there can also be considerable overlap between them and the two tend to go together. In sexual torture, sexual assault is a form of sexual humiliation *par excellence* and sexual humiliation often rests on the threat of physical or sexual assault. What form of sexual assault—if any—might actually have taken place may be impossible to determine but the possibility needs to be recognised and confronted more honestly than has happened so far. To shed light on this, further historical investigation into the treatment of condemned prisoners by Roman soldiers and the treatment of Jesus in particular is obviously required. If this is to happen, however, it is appropriate to pause and ask what positive purpose these lines of enquiry will serve.

49 *Gorgias*, 473C, cited in Sloyan, *The Crucifixion of Jesus*, 16.

50 Trexler, *Sex and Conquest*, 20. According to Trexler, 'in the Ancient Greek world... the premier sign of male dependence was to be anally or orally penetrated by another male without, at least fictively, being able to resist', 33; he continues, 'Seneca ... declared that "bad army officers and wicked tyrants are the main sources of rapes of young men"', 34. In this context even the widely held assumption that the soldiers forced Jesus to wear scarlet/purple clothing for solely political mockery might be reconsidered. Dressing a male victim in bright clothing might also have been a prelude to sexual assault (cf. Trexler, *Sex and Conquest*, 34).

51 This might also have implications for the question of why Judas had profound feelings of regret and repentance for his actions (Luke 22:3-5). Judas may not have anticipated the full implications of his betrayal and if the argument here is correct his despair and shame would be easy to understand.

Theological and Pastoral Perspectives

I have found the direction my research has taken me to be very disturbing and I realise that others will feel the same way. Presenting Jesus' treatment in terms of sexual humiliation and perhaps sexual assault is like uncovering a crime against human rights from nearly two thousand years ago. In a court justice system this would be far too long ago to permit or warrant criminal investigation. Some might claim that, in the same way, to raise the issues of sexual humiliation and assault in the passion narratives can serve no positive purpose and that intrusive enquiries simply add to the distress of those who wish to remember and honour the victim.⁵² I believe, however, that, for Christians today, these issues might serve constructive purposes in the theological and pastoral fields. Both our resistance and our openness to this line of enquiry might lead to insights and discoveries.

First, at a theological level, confronting the possibility of sexual abuse in the passion of Christ might deepen Christian understanding of God's solidarity with the powerless. Sexual abuse is a destructive assertion of power rather than simply a result of lust. It shows the sinful impulses and degrading consequences that distorted power can generate in human society. An important element in Christian doctrine has been that Jesus confronted the power of evil and suffered death on the cross as a result. The views presented here—that Jesus was a victim of sexual abuse in the sexual humiliation he underwent and he may even have been a victim of sexual assault—are deeply distressing. They may, however, offer insights into a fuller Christian understanding of a God who is in real solidarity with the powerless and suffers the worst evils of the world. An *a priori* judgement that Jesus did not and could not suffer sexual abuse may accompany an unexamined assumption that Jesus was not in fact fully human, a form of the docetic heresy which denies the real form of Jesus' physical suffering. Refusal to accept that Jesus could have been sexually abused suggests a refusal to accept Christ's full incarnation into human history. To say that Jesus *could* not have been vulnerable to the worst abuses of human power is to deny that he was truly human at all.

52 Human Rights organisations in Latin America have had to justify their investigations into what many in society would prefer to have forgotten from only a few years before. On the other side victims have often struggled to keep the memory alive as means to demand the truth about what happened that might contribute to the difficult process of self-healing, serve as a warning to others and maybe bring the guilty to justice. For discussion of Latin American truth commissions and other attempts to preserve the memory of wide-scale human rights abuse in Latin America, see the collection of articles presented as 'Unearthing Memory: The Present Struggle Over the Past' in *NACLA: Report on the Americas* 32.2 (1998) 15-41. On the importance of *la memoria* for victims, see N.C. Hollander, *Love in a Time of Hate: Liberation Psychology in Latin America* (Rutgers, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998). The assassination of Bishop Juan Gerardi, head of the REMHI project, on 26 April 1998 (two days after the final report was presented), shows the determination in some parts of Latin American society to ensure that the past is forgotten. The arrest of Augusto Pinochet at a London clinic on 16 October 1998 (in response to a request from a Spanish judge with a view to extradition and trial in Spain from crimes during his dictatorship in Chile) has given these debates new vigour.

At the pastoral level, confronting the possibility of sexual abuse in the passion of Christ could provide practical help to contemporary victims of torture and sexual abuse. Recognition of sexual abuse in the treatment of Jesus could bring a liberating and healing message to the women, children and men of Latin America and elsewhere who have also been abused. The acceptance that even Jesus may have suffered evil in this way can give new dignity and self-respect to those who continue to struggle with the stigma and other consequences of sexual abuse. A God who through Christ is to be identified with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned (Matt. 25.31-46), is also to be identified with those suffering abuse and torture in the modern world. This is the case regardless of whether Jesus was 'merely' sexually humiliated in public or also assaulted in private.

Conclusion

Despite the potential pitfalls, the Latin American social context can be a fruitful starting point for insights into the Gospels. An awareness of human rights abuses in Latin America can yield important insights into the political context and full horror of Jesus' crucifixion. The role of crucifixions in the production and maintenance of state terror and the element of sexual abuse in Roman practices require further investigation. The Gospels indicate a high level of public sexual humiliation in the treatment of Jesus and the closed walls of the praetorium present a disturbing question about what else might have happened inside.

Jesus as Victim of State Terror: A Critical Reflection Twenty Years Later

Fernando F. Segovia

For a long time now, the life and work of David Tombs have been associated, in sustained and systematic fashion, with the cause of human and social rights in general and the study of the theology and hermeneutics of Liberation in particular. This piece, 'Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse', represents a salient example of this juncture of political-ideological commitments in life and intellectual-scholarly pursuits in the academy. Professor Tombs has kindly invited me to write a reflection on the occasion of its recirculation, and this I have accepted to do with pleasure. Indeed, this is a study that very much bears ongoing attention and discussion today, twenty years after its publication. Toward this end, my reflection will be in the form of a critical revisiting and engagement. By way of introduction, I would point out, this is a study with which I have been associated in various ways over the course of these two decades, from inception through publication to revival.

To begin with, the study first came to life, bearing the title of 'Biblical Interpretation in Latin America: 1968–1998', as a scholarly presentation at the 1998 International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Krakow, Poland. It was to have been given within the context of a programme unit, 'Contextual Biblical Hermeneutics', for which I served, along with Professor Jeremy Punt of the University of Stellenbosch (South Africa), as co-chair. In this capacity, I read the proposal submitted for consideration, voted directly for inclusion in the programme, and listened to the first presentation of the argument *in situ*. What I heard, however, was a different presentation altogether, now given a different subtitle, 'Biblical Interpretation in Latin America: Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse'.

Subsequently, a full-fledged version of this presentation was published in 1999, under its present title, in the now-defunct *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*.¹ This study I came upon later on and since then have used, through the years, in various course offerings as a pointed example of political biblical criticism.² Now, the essay is brought to life again, with broader distribution and wider discussion in mind, by way of Creative Commons, given what the author regards as its enduring relevance, in the light of all that has transpired in the world since its initial appearance.³ For this occasion, I have the privilege of offering a reflection on such recirculation, and this I do, upon a rereading of the argument, no less convinced than the author of its keen and ongoing significance.

1 David Tombs, 'Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse,' *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 53:1-2 (1999), 89-109.

2 While this type of criticism may be seen as encompassing a number of variations, I have in mind here the mutual enlightenment of the world of the reader and the world of the text in and through the realm of politics: the association of figures, events, and scenarios from the biblical texts with figures, events, and scenarios in the world, so that the former are seen as somehow actualized in the latter and the latter as somehow signified by the former.

3 Creative Commons is a digital global network (creativecommons.org) that provides a platform for sharing knowledge and creativity with the aim in mind of building a 'more equitable, accessible, and innovative world' and thus ushering in a 'new era of development, growth and productivity.' This it does by providing copyright licences that are free and readily accessible in order to make possible a 'simple and standardized way to give the public permission to share and use your creative work—on conditions of your choice.'

My reflection will focus first on the life and work of the author and then on the study itself. By way of background, I would note that I am no stranger to reigns of terror and that, as such, my engagement is at once academic and personal. By the time that I was thirteen years of age, in the year of 1961, I had already experienced, as a young citizen of the Republic of Cuba, an authoritarian dictatorship of the Right, under the control of Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar (1952-1959), and an authoritarian dictatorship of the Left, under the power of Fidel Castro Ruz (1959-2008). Just as the former had been shored up by the imperial domain of the United States of America, so had the latter found support in the imperial domain of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Both regimes embodied all the dimensions of state terror outlined by Tombs: control of the population through a policy of intimidation, meant to yield silence and conformism; reprisals against opponents through the dispensation of physical punishment, including execution; sexualization of such punishment, abuse by way of humiliation and assault. Further, what all such policies and measures reveal about both regimes is the hypermasculinity of the holders of power, and thereby, inevitably, their sense of hyper-insecurity as well.

Given such a state of affairs, my parents—having been supporters of revolutionary change and subsequently critics of revolutionary dogmatism, all under the banner of Christian social democracy—decided to emigrate. This they did for their own sake, certainly, for they found themselves increasingly in danger, but also, and above all, for the sake of their children, whom they did not want to continue to live in such conditions. Over a weekend in July of 1961, therefore, I found myself on the other side of the Florida Straits—away from my home, my people, my way of life. The life of a refugee, however, is never over: the memories and the feelings, the traumas, of the times-before continue well into, even growing and spreading, in the times-after. What Tombs mentions here with regard to the decades of the 1960s through the 1980s in Latin America, I remember from the middle of the 1950s to the beginning of the 1960s. All of this I have pondered and theorized many times over the years. This reflection on Tombs has led me to do so yet again, and to this I shall return at the end.

Reflection on the Life and Work of David Tombs

I noted above how Tombs signifies a coming together of two realms of activity: in the world of the academy, intellectual-scholarly concerns having to do with the project of Liberation; in the world at large, political-ideological engagements revolving around the promotion of social justice. This juxtaposition of personal paths I should like to unfold in greater detail by way of introduction to the reflection on the study as such. With regard to academic pursuits, I would characterize his work on the theology and hermeneutics of Liberation as outstanding. With regard to life commitments, I would describe his pursuit of human and social rights as no less distinguished.

I begin with a comment on his trajectory regarding the project of Liberation. I cannot think of a better account of the emergence and development of the movement in Latin America than that portrayed in his volume of 2002, *Latin American Liberation Theology*.⁴ In this work, written thirty years after the irruption of Liberation, Tombs offers an orderly account—at

4 David Tombs, *Latin American Liberation Theology* (Religion in the Americas Series 1; Boston-Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002).

once thorough and flowing—of its historical origins and trajectory: first, a summary of the religious-theological situation in the region from 1492 to 1959, from the times of conquest to the times of revolution; then, four decades, from the 1960s through the 1990s, of development marked by advances and challenges, promises and crises, expansions and defences; lastly, a raising of the fundamental question, at the end of the century, whether an era had now come to an end.⁵

A most effective and enlightening element of this account, I find, is the way in which, decade by decade and sometimes even quinquennium by quinquennium, Tombs brings together in conversation what is taking place in the ecclesial-theological world, the primary focus of attention, and what is taking place in the social-cultural world, a secondary focus. In so doing, he provides, quite in keeping with the emphasis of Liberation on context, a most incisive account of the movement within its Latin American context, immediate as well as extended.

Likewise, I have always held in the highest regard his elaboration of the whence and wherefore, the dynamics and mechanics, of the hermeneutics of Liberation in an extended study, 'The Hermeneutics of Liberation', published several years earlier, in 1995. This work formed part of a volume, for which Tombs also served as co-editor,⁶ devoted to the exposition of various approaches to the interpretation of the New Testament in vogue at the turn of the century. Its elaboration may be seen as three-pronged.

He begins by grounding this approach to the biblical texts within the overall religious-theological impulse of Liberation—addressing the social reality of poverty and oppression in Latin America. He continues by showing the ways in which the approach engages in reading texts as well as results emerging from such reading—with the preferential option for and the commitment to the liberation of the poor and the oppressed in mind. He concludes by weighing various critiques lodged against such a reading of the Bible, from critical and theological circles alike, and defending its viability, critically and theologically, whether at the popular or the learned level—focusing on the poor and the oppressed as academically rigorous, theologically sound, and ideologically appropriate. The result is a comprehensive presentation, quite in keeping with the multiple demands of the project of Liberation, regarding foundational principles, methodological tools, and ideological stances.

I continue with a comment on his trajectory with respect to the cause of social justice. Three stages of professional life can be outlined in terms of academic appointments, given different contexts and undertakings. The first is based in England, as Lecturer in Theology at the University of Roehampton in London, where he teaches from 1992 to 2001. He comes to this position after earning a BA in Theology and Philosophy from Trinity College, Oxford University, and a Master in Sacred Theology from Union Theological Seminary, New York. During these years, he pursued a doctoral degree in Theology at Heythrop College, University of London. The second stage begins with a move to the Republic of Ireland, as Assistant Professor of Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation at the Irish School of Ecumenics of

5 The summary of the long-standing state of affairs is provided in the first chapter, 'Power and Privilege: 1492-1959'. The treatment by decades proceeds as follows: (a) the 1960s, 'Engaging the World: 1960-1969'; (b) the 1970s, 'The Preferential Option for the Poor: 1970-1979'; (c) the 1980s, 'The God of Life: 1980-1989'; (d) the 1990s, 'Crisis of Hope: the 1990s'.

6 David Tombs, 'The Hermeneutics of Liberation,' in Stanley E. Porter and David Tombs (eds.), *Approaches to New Testament Study* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 120; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

Trinity College, Dublin. Here he works from 2001 through 2014 as part of its Peace and Conflict Programme, based in Belfast, Northern Ireland. The third stage starts with a move to Aotearoa/New Zealand, as both the Howard Paterson Professor of Theology and Public Issues and the Director of the Centre for Theology and Public Issues at the University of Otago, in Dunedin, Otago. This Centre, based in the Department of Religion and Theology, is affiliated with the Global Network for Public Theology, a research partnership geared toward the promotion of theological contributions on public issues in global/local fashion, especially those affecting the poor and those impacting the environment.

All three stages are marked by Tombs' pursuit of human and social rights in his growing role as a public theologian—a critic who works at the intersection of the religious-theological realm and the social-cultural realm. During the first stage, his concern centres on the religious and social dimensions of conflict in the context of Latin America. The set of challenges faced are those foregrounded by the Liberation movement through the turbulent decades of the 1960s through the 1980s: the reality of massive poverty and oppression; the struggle for transformation of this reality; the counter-responses at the hands of both the church and the state. This task he channels through his doctoral work on the problematic of christology in Liberation Theology, which leads to the production of the two major works mentioned above, along with the study under discussion here on the dynamics and mechanics of state terror.

With the second stage, the focus shifts to issues of social and religious conflict related to the context of Northern Ireland. A different set of challenges comes to the fore: the question of religious identity in divided societies; the nature of religious commitment to social justice; and the relation between religion and violence. This task he undertakes, in keeping with his appointment, with peace and reconciliation in mind. In the third stage, his interest turns to the religious and social dimensions of conflict in the context of Aotearoa/New Zealand. A new set of challenges presents itself: the issue of family violence; the crisis of the environment; and the question of sexual abuse. This task he takes up, in accordance with his appointment, with theological insight and social transformation in mind.

Beyond such shifting and reshifting of aims, in response to changes in location and context, the continuity of the quest for social justice is evident. In effect, these various stages emerge as by no means self-standing and self-contained but rather as interrelated and cumulative. They look back and forward to one another—retaining and advancing, appropriating and developing, what has gone on before in new directions. Excellent examples of this dialogical process can be seen at work in returns of the third stage to the first. One is the new focus on the crisis of sexual abuse in general, which goes back to the mixture of violence and sexuality identified at the heart of state terror. The other is the topic chosen for the Inaugural Lecture at Otago, 'Latin American Liberation Theology and its Ongoing Legacy,' which revisits the beginnings of the trajectory.

I should like to bring this initial account of the religious-theological and political-ideological juxtaposition embodied by Professor Tombs to a close with a comment on his Preface for the present recirculation of this early essay from 1998. A personal recollection therein shows how these two dimensions of his work affect one another in direct and profound fashion. I noted above how the paper that I had accepted for inclusion in the program of the 1998 SBL International Meeting was not what I heard at the meeting itself. This recollection explains why. Having submitted a proposal for a paper on the hermeneutics of Liberation, Tombs

explains, what was presented *in situ* was a paper on the joint dispensation of physical force and public shame via execution under the machinery of state terror. This change of topic was directly motivated by a sense of social justice, brought about in turn by the impact of his doctoral research at that point—learning about the politics of torture and annihilation in Latin America; reading individual stories about such practices, in particular a most gruesome one from El Salvador; and noting the silence regarding such practices and accounts on the part of Liberation theologians. Such work, he concludes, made a shift in topic imperative. This comment brings sharply to the fore Tombs' conception of the character and mode of the public theologian as a critic straddling the religious realm and the social realm.

Reflection on the Study

I turn now to a reflection on the study itself. The personal recollection provides an excellent point of entry in this regard. Tombs explains how such research led to a different approach to the topic of biblical hermeneutics in Liberation. Rather than provide an overview of such criticism from the beginning (1968) until then (1998), as originally intended, he decided to focus instead on what I would characterize as a fundamental problematic in criticism: the relation between the contemporary context of criticism and the interpretation of the texts.

Tombs notes how, as a result of such research, he had come to the realization that 'the current political context' of Latin America could 'offer insights into biblical texts'. Consequently, he resolved to show how the utterly shocking public execution of a female health worker in the context of state terror in El Salvador in the early 1980s—alongside countless other instances of similar executions throughout Latin America during the decades in question—could shed light on the public crucifixion of Jesus in a context of state terror in Palestine under the Roman Empire.

This task he pursued in three ways. To begin with, at a critical level, he explores the possibility, given the dynamics and mechanics of state terror—which involved physical torture and sexual abuse—that Jesus could also have been the victim of public sexual humiliation as well as assault. Further, at a theological level, he offers such a representation of Jesus, whether established or possible, as a signifier of God's identification with victims of sexual abuse, a further example of God's solidarity with the oppressed and the powerless. In confronting the evil of the world, Jesus as the Christ suffered on the cross the consequences of such a confrontation, including the evil of sexual victimization. Lastly, at a pastoral level, he presents such a theological view of Jesus as a call for sensitivity and assistance toward victims of sexual abuse on the part of Christian communities.

The study offers much material for reflection. As preamble, it should be noted that Tombs does accept the critical point at issue: the Gospels indicate that Jesus did suffer sexual humiliation at the hands of the machinery of state terror and do allow for the possibility that such humiliation included sexual assault as well. Given such acceptance, both the theological and the pastoral implications of such a finding are readily activated as well: the sexual treatment visited upon Jesus during the process of execution can function as a theological symbol of God's partiality toward and as a pastoral demand for action regarding victims of sexual violence. In my reflection I should like to focus on the model for doing theology followed by Tombs and, more specifically, on the role of biblical hermeneutics within it.

The model, not surprisingly, is quintessentially liberationist. Doing Liberation Theology involves a threefold process.⁷ This entire process has the phenomenon of oppression in view, certainly in terms of poverty as economic oppression, the overwhelming reality of Latin America and the Caribbean, but also in terms of oppression writ large—gender, ethnic, racial. A first stage, socioanalytic mediation, demands critical analysis of society and culture. Its aim is to examine the conditions of the oppressed and the reasons for such oppression—how and why the oppressed are oppressed. This step yields reality-as-analysed. A second stage, hermeneutical mediation, calls for critical analysis of the biblical texts and the ecclesial traditions. The objective here is to ascertain the perspective of the Christian tradition, scriptural as well as ecclesiastical, on oppression—where God stands with regard to the oppressed. The result of this step is tradition-as-analysed. A third stage, practical mediation, demands critical analysis of project and strategies to be adopted. Its aim is to devise and implement an appropriate course of action with regard to oppression—how transformation can be brought about for the oppressed. This step yields action-as-analysed.

The role of the Bible in the model is decidedly liberationist as well. All three stages of the process are closely intertwined. Thus, the findings of the first stage, the mapping of reality-as-analysed, are brought under the lens of the results from the second stage, the mapping of the tradition-as-analysed. In so doing, the process seeks understanding and enlightenment from the sources of the Christian tradition, above all the biblical texts. Similarly, the results of the second stage, the mapping of the tradition-as-analysed, are used as the foundation toward the transformation of the findings from the first stage, the mapping of society-as-analysed, according to the findings from the third stage, the mapping of action-as-analysed. In so doing, the process draws on guidance and direction from the Christian tradition, again primarily from the biblical texts. At the core of the process, therefore, lies the religious-theological tradition, with special emphasis on the Bible.

In the present study not only are all three stages of the process at work but also the most attention is bestowed on the central, hermeneutical, step. In effect, therefore, what the study reveals is a classic exercise in the theology and hermeneutics of liberation on the part of Tombs. At the same time, each stage reveals interesting variations.

The first stage, the socio-analytic mediation, is well represented in the study. The critical analysis of society and culture has to do with the political trajectory of Latin America and the Caribbean from the 1960s through the 1980s. This the introduction makes explicit: the political scenario in question is that of ‘state terror’ as exercised by many regimes throughout the continent. The machinery of state terror, which often led to the execution of the victims, involved the use of physical force and sexual abuse, the application of physical torture as well as the dispensation of sexual humiliation and assault. Its aim was to instil a sense of fear and promote an attitude of fatalism among the population. The main body of the study provides a detailed account of the dynamics and mechanics of this machinery, drawing on a variety of sources: scholarly treatments of the systems of terror; final reports from official investigative commissions; and stories from or about its victims. This critical analysis is thorough: what state terror implied and entailed is well researched and delineated.

7 A succinct presentation of the method is provided by Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (trans. Paul Burns; Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008 [Portuguese original, 1986], 22-42 (Chapter 3: ‘How Liberation is Done’).

At the same time, an unusual move in this first step should be noted. In dealing with Latin America and the Caribbean, Tombs is not analysing his own social and cultural context. What he addresses is the political framework behind his area of research, not his own as researcher. This variation I find to be altogether appropriate and productive. There is no reason why a critic should limit oneself to one's own context, provided that the critic engages in analysis of any context in question. In fact, to my mind, that is precisely what criticism should do. Thereby the universal concerns and commitments of criticism are duly affirmed, always with a sense of justice and an eye on the excluded or marginalized. That is what Tombs does here, exercising the role of a public theologian and invoking the model of liberationist reflection in so doing.

The second stage, the hermeneutical mediation, is also well pursued in the study. The critical analysis of the biblical texts, undertaken in the main body, is developed in two directions. First, it focuses on their context—the scenario of state terror represented by the Roman Empire in the first century. The process leading to the execution of victims, with its attendant elements of physical force and sexual abuse, is set forth, paying close attention to sexual humiliation and assault. Likewise, the goal of control and fear with regard to the population is affirmed. Such practices are well delineated on the basis of secondary as well as primary sources, with special emphasis on evidence from Palestine. Second, the analysis centres on the texts themselves—the passion narratives of the Gospels. Such practices are well traced in the accounts of Jesus' crucifixion, with special emphasis on signs of sexual assault regarding the person of Jesus. Such a turn of events is presented not as definitively established, as in the case of sexual humiliation, but as altogether conceivable, given the circumstances. This critical analysis is sharp: the comparative exercise shows that much can be learned about the ancient scenario of state terror in the first-century Roman Empire from the modern scenario of state terror in Latin America, and hence about the crucifixion of Jesus from the execution of contemporary victims.

Again, however, an unusual variation in this second stage is to be noted. In such comparisons involving the world of the reader and the world of the Bible, the flow is generally from antiquity to the present, whereby clarity is sought from and provided by the Word of God on contemporary reality. Here, however, the flow is decidedly from the present to antiquity, drawing on everyday reality for greater clarity on the Word of God. Such a move I find entirely valid and fruitful as well. A twofold foundation is provided in the introduction. Epistemologically, it is argued that assumptions made about the original contexts of texts are often drawn, consciously or unconsciously, from the current context of readers. Such bridging, in other words, is inevitable. Theologically, it is added that contextual approaches to biblical hermeneutics hold that engagement with context today sheds light on the context of the biblical past. Such bridging, in other words, is regarded as established and viewed as revealing.

I could not agree more. If one views society and culture in terms of conflict, generated and maintained by unequal formations and relations of power across all levels of action and all axes of identity, then there is no reason why one cannot bring together in critical conversation—across historical periods and social-cultural frameworks—similar scenarios of conflict for comparative purposes, with mutual illumination and evaluation in mind. Such bringing together can be carried out at a learned academic level or at an instinctive popular level. Such bringing together can further be pursued in either direction or in both.

In this study, the point of comparison between the Roman past and the Latin American present has to do with the realm of state (geo)politics in terms of the given relations between rulers and subjects. Such relations reveal conflict at their core: the imposition of state terror;

the effects of terror unleashed on the minds and bodies of the population; the machinery of terror displayed in the execution of victims; and the recourse to sexual abuse of victims in executions. To my mind, therefore, criticism should engage in such comparisons across time and space regardless of direction. Again, the universal concerns and commitments of criticism, its sense of justice and its tilt toward the excluded or marginalized, are thereby duly activated. This is what Tombs does here, deploying the model of liberationist reflection in his role as public theologian: proceeding from the present to the past, only to return to the present, as the third stage shows.

The third stage, the practical mediation, is the least developed. The critical analysis of project and strategies is envisioned but not worked out. The main object of attention of the study—beyond its investigation into and comparison between scenarios of terror and execution of victims in the early first-century Roman Empire and late twentieth-century Latin America—is the element of sexual abuse in such executions via the sexualization of the victims. At the core of this concern, there lies an overriding preoccupation regarding the figure of Jesus—could he too have been a victim not just of sexual humiliation but also of sexual assault? It is a possibility described as ‘very disturbing’ and ‘deeply distressing’. This possibility is also given a constructive turn—not for the sake of historical information and accuracy, but rather for the purpose of theological and pastoral appropriation. This both the introduction and the conclusion set forth.

Such positive appropriation has the social-cultural context of sexual abuse and its victims in mind. This certainly comprehends the victims of abuse—the many women, children, and men—at the hands of state terror throughout Latin America. It also encompasses, however, all victims of abuse elsewhere, in all places and at all times. From a theological perspective, the sexual abuse of Jesus, whether as reality or as possibility, is appropriated as signifying the identification of God, through the person of Christ, with another dimension of abuse of power in society and culture. Beyond the hungry and the thirsty, the stranger and the naked, the sick and the imprisoned, such identification is taken to extend not just to the victims of torture, not just to the victims of sexual humiliation, but also to the victims of sexual assault. Such appropriation reveals the solidarity of God with all the poor and the oppressed, and in this case with a form of oppression that Jesus himself may have suffered and died for. From a pastoral perspective, the sexual abuse of Jesus, whether actual or conceivable, is appropriated, given its theological import, as a source of healing for the abused, toward the restoration of dignity and self-respect, and a demand for sensitivity on the part of Christians, toward understanding of and help with this stigma.

Such reflections bring out the religious-theological dimension of the liberationist model of hermeneutics. Liberation has traditionally subscribed to an exalted view of the Bible as the Word of God. This applies to all essential components surrounding the concept of the Word of God: revelation—the Bible conveys the message of God to the world; inspiration—the Bible does so as inspired by God through the Holy Spirit; and authority—the Bible does so in normative fashion, beyond critique of any sort. While not explicit in the study, such a stance is nonetheless clearly in evidence, especially with respect to the revelatory character of the text. Thus, for Tombs, the real or possible perpetration of sexual abuse on Jesus, within the confines of the praetorium, is a message of God to the world. This message is one of liberation: God’s identification and solidarity, through the ‘full incarnation’ of Jesus the Christ ‘in human history’, with a distinctive formation of the powerless, the sexually abused. This critical analysis is limited: the principles for theological and pastoral appropriation are well enunciated, but their actual channels or means of implementation remain to be elaborated.

Yet again, an unusual move in this third stage should be noted. Tombs moves beyond the ambit of Latin America and the Caribbean, and indeed beyond any scenario of state terror, by taking the theological and appropriations of his study as relevant for all victims of sexual abuse. This variation I find to be altogether appropriate and productive as well. There is no reason why the practical resolutions for a particular context should not be seen as relevant for other contexts, provided that such applications are tightly focused and weighed. To the contrary, such transfers and adaptations belong, to my mind, to the task of criticism. To be sure, at some point, a critical analysis of the sexual abuse in question, especially outside the parameters of state terror (as in the realm of the family or the church, for example), would be in order. In such amplifications, the universal concerns and commitments of criticism would be, once again, duly affirmed, in keeping with its sense of justice and its option for the excluded or marginalized. This is what Tombs does here, assuming his role as a public theologian and resorting to the model of liberationist reflection.

Concluding Comments

I should like to bring this twofold reflection of mine to conclusion by returning to Tombs' Preface. I resorted to it earlier, at the end of the reflection on his life and work, in order to show the close relationship that exists between his intellectual-scholarly concerns and his political-ideological commitments. This relationship exemplified, I argued, his conception of the public theologian as a critic at the intersection of the public and religious realms. I resort to it now, at the end of the reflection on his study, in order to emphasise his conviction, as a public theologian, regarding its ongoing relevance, and hence the need for renewed and broader consideration and discussion. Such conviction recalls and reaffirms the third stage of the liberationist analysis deployed: the extension of the context of sexual abuse beyond the boundaries of state terror in the Latin America of the 1960s through the 1980s.

In effect, Tombs names three distinctive contexts of sexual abuse since the publication of the study. The first continues the scenario of state terror, but now with reference to the Middle East, in particular to the Second Gulf War (2003-2011), where the United States engaged in sustained practices of physical torture and sexual abuse of prisoners, as revealed in, but by no means limited to, the exposé of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal. The second moves to the religious-ecclesial scenario of sexual abuse within the institutional context of the Roman Catholic Church uncovered, in ever-growing and seemingly endless fashion, throughout the world. The third looks to the social-cultural scenario of sexual harassment and abuse of women coming to the fore, in ever-expanding circles and with ever-expanding ferocity, with the emergence of #MeToo movement in 2017.

In the face of such developments since 1998, Tombs' vision and commitment as a public theologian returns to his study on Jesus as a victim of state terror as a way of updating and amplifying its import. For all victims of sexual abuse, within and beyond parameters of terror state, in Latin America or elsewhere, the figure of Jesus as a real or possible victim of similar abuse during the process of execution is seen as having far-reaching and broad-ranging theological as well as pastoral ramifications. Such a figure can be readily marshalled toward the project of Liberation. Thus, among the poor and the oppressed, God stands, through Jesus, with all those who have suffered the violence and embody the trauma of sexual abuse. Consequently, all Christian communities, as followers of Jesus and children of God, should stand in ready and effective solidarity with such victims.

For Tombs, the path ahead is clear. Among the projects to be pursued within the Centre for Theology and Public Issues is the one mentioned in the Preface, for which he serves as director: ‘When Did We See You Naked?’ The Project Statement presents it as follows: ‘How can churches and church agencies offer an appropriate and effective response to sexual violence in its many different forms?’⁸ For my part, two comments are in order. First of all, I am only too happy and most grateful to have contributed in this small way to this particular and pressing dimension of oppression in the world. It is one that should be kept in mind at all times and one that this study has brought home to me in a direct and consequential way. In addition, such awareness leads me to expand on the role of criticism, a point that I have raised in the course of this reflection with regard to Tombs’ deviations from the liberationist model. This I now wish to do in terms of my own conception and formulation of the voice and role of a critic. For this, then, I return to my comment in the introduction regarding my acquaintance with realms of terror since my earliest years and my engagement at once academic and personal with this study.

That early experience of mine led to a fear of all authority, a fear of reprisal, whether of the Right or of the Left. With time, such fear turned into an attitude of suspicion and questioning regarding all authority, of both the Right and the Left. That experience of mine was also one of migration, a path of unsettlement and resettlement, leading to ethnicist and nativist encasement and marginalization. Over time, such othering developed into a mode of self-construction and self-direction. In both regards, what had begun in an ambience of terror and displacement ended in liberation. Such liberation led, gradually, to a sense of criticism as encompassing the whole of society and culture, locally as well as globally, historically as well as presently—always with a sense of justice and a bent toward situations and individuals without it. From a biblical critic, working within the confines of a field of studies, I developed into a critic open to and involved in the world, as conceptualized by Intellectual Studies.⁹

The movement and project of Liberation proved enormously instrumental in theorizing and channelling such a vision of the critical role on my part. It is a role not at all unlike what Tombs names, for himself, as a public theologian. I prefer the term critic myself, insofar as it moves beyond the distinction of religious and public. In any case, we are not far off at all in our respective conceptions of our tasks. As a critic thus defined, this particular study has made me sharply aware of the policies and the practices, the consequences and the traumas, of sexualization not only in circumstances of realms of terror but also beyond such parameters. For such a contribution to and expansion of my critical horizons, I am, again, most grateful to Professor Tombs. That is especially so, because, as he points out in the Preface, such scenarios of sexual harassment and abuse seem to multiply on a daily basis across all segments of society and culture.

Professor Tombs’ response in this regard I find to be right on target: a public theologian fights back in whatever way one can, and this he does by recirculation of his earlier study and the launching of a major project for the Centre. In this endeavour, I am, again, only too happy to be of assistance, small as it may be, for such oppression calls for justice and a tilt toward the victims—and this I willingly and readily grant and support as an intellectual critic. In the end, therefore, it is Liberation that has, in different ways and from different backgrounds, brought us together.

8 See the statement of the Project Introduction at <https://www.otago.ac.nz/ctpi/projects/2018/otago675463.html>

9 On the vision and mission of criticism, see my presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature, ‘Criticism in Critical Times: Reflection on Vision and Task’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 134 (2015) 6–29.



Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse Text and Context

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